

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EUGENE DISTRICT OFFICE

1792A
EA-00-04

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
and
DECISION RECORD

Shotgun Project Area
Management of a 27-mile Loop System of Road and Trail Segments
EA (Environmental Assessment) No. OR090-00-04

Background

The McKenzie Resource Area completed an EA and preliminary FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact) for a proposal to manage a 27-mile system of roads and trails as a trail recreation opportunity. The EA described a variety of actions including trail signing, road-to-trail conversion, trail construction, scheduled road and trail maintenance, bridge construction, and cooperative trail management with Willamette Industries (private landowner). The involved roads and trails traverse public and private lands in and around the Shotgun area of the Mohawk drainage. The actions would take place within a 5-year period beginning in the year 2000.

Consultation

Consultation with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service and the United States National Marine and Fisheries Service occurred.

Public comments

A public notice advertising the availability of EA OR090-00-04 and preliminary FONSI appeared in the Eugene Register-Guard on March 22, 2000. Additionally, the EA and preliminary FONSI were mailed to interested individuals and organizations (EA OR090-00-04, p. 40). A 30-day public comment period closed on April 21, 2000. Five letters were received. BLM responded to public comments in several ways: (1) some modifications were made to the EA and FONSI, (2) letters addressing specific points were sent to some individuals, and (3) no response was provided to comments determined to be outside the scope of the project. Finally, public comments that were expressed by more than 1 individual and/or warranted more detailed explanation are addressed below:

Project Scope

Section 1.1 of the project EA describes BLM's proposal to manage a system of mostly existing

roads and trails for motorized trail recreation. This proposal represents a first step towards managing the growing OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) activity occurring within the 21,974-acre project area. It focuses upon roads and trails predominately, although not exclusively, used by off-road motorcyclists. A local, off-road motorcycle group introduced the general route to BLM through past Special Recreation Permit requests. The system's popularity, loop characteristic, predominant occurrence on public lands, and known resource impacts combine to support BLM's decision to analyze this combination of roads and trails as a reasonable starting point for managing motorized trail recreation within the planning area.

Subsequent trail connections and/or trail closures are anticipated through future trail planning efforts that will explore motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities (Section 1.3 of the project EA describes this as 1 of 4 project objectives). Consequently, trail management actions described under this EA (e.g., signing, bridge construction, road-to-trail conversions, etc.) are expected to serve as a beginning to a fuller trail management program anticipated to be developed within a 3-5 year period. The broader trail management program, particularly where restrictions or closures would apply, would reasonably include greater emphasis upon trail enforcement measures.

Inclusion of the No Action Alternative

Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) state that agencies shall include the *No Action* alternative (CEQ 1502.14(d)). The *No Action* alternative is the baseline for the rest of the project analysis. For that reason, BLM is mandated to always analyze and fully discuss the *No Action* alternative. Under *No Action*, environmental consequences will still occur because the existing environment is not static.

The Number of Stream Crossings & Culvert Removals Included Within Existing and Proposed Trail Segments

The project EA described a range of 4-9 possible bridge construction sites within the proposed 27-mile loop system. This range was given on the basis of 3 existing water-trail intersections, and the possibility of additional water-trail intersections created as a consequence of culvert removal during road-to-trail conversion. Subsequent field checks by interdisciplinary team members have resulted in a determination that remaining culverts need not be removed as part of road-to-trail conversion because physical evidence shows the culverts pose no risk to safety nor resource condition. Reasons for this finding are as follows:

- (1) Culverts along BLM Road Nos. 15-2-22 and 15-1-18 are functioning and do not indicate a risk of imminent catastrophic failure. Fill material, road surfaces, cutslopes, and fillslopes associated with existing culverts are presently stable. No evidence suggests that the culvert sites are eroding or deteriorating to the extent of causing a potential sedimentation problem.

(2) The streams that cross roads are outside of the recognized range of potential trout habitat and over 2 miles away from potential spring chinook salmon habitat. The existing culverts do not impair or obstruct the movement of salmonid fish.

(3) Removal of the culverts would disturb the fill and bed materials that are currently stable. In some instances, fill material is in excess of 20 feet deep along BLM Road 15-1-18, and between 5-10 feet deep along BLM Road 15-2-22. Removal of this group of culverts would necessitate the disturbance of a large quantity of fill material and construction of a bridge at each site to allow continued safe trail use.

Based upon the above rationale, bridge construction sites are anticipated at 3 locations where trail segments currently intersect open channels. During routine trail monitoring activities, the existing culverts along BLM Road Nos. 15-2-22 and 15-1-18 will be assessed and, if warranted, maintenance activities would be initiated.

Road Safety

The project EA describes trail signing as a component of Alternatives I and III. However, signing of road segments identified as part of the proposed 27-mile loop system was not described. Despite this omission, cautionary road signing will be implemented where roads overlap with the proposed 27-mile loop system. These signs will alert drivers to potential OHV activity along the road. Placement of transportation signs, including recreational or informational signs, does not require the preparation of an EA or EIS.

Threatened and Endangered Species Alternative

An alternative designed to eliminate impacts to bald eagles and spotted owls was not developed because, in the case of the former, the proposed route is not within suitable nesting habitat nor are eagles roosting within 0.25 mile of roads and trails proposed for management (EA OR090-00-04, p. 24). With respect to the spotted owl, an alternative that eliminated OHV activity within the unmapped LSR (Late Successional Reserve) and overlapping owl nesting habitat was not developed for the following reasons: (1) absence of nesting owls within the overlapping boundaries, (2) road-related safety concerns (i.e., off-road motorcycle use of a winding, well-traveled road with limited turnouts), and (3) steep topography surrounding the unmapped LSR that precludes new construction opportunities. Additionally, the proposed seasonal restriction preventing organized, motorized events would be required as mitigation should a nesting owl pair be found within the unmapped LSR during annual surveys. Finally, potential effects of casual OHV use linked to other smaller owl nesting habitats within the project area is expected to be small since only a minimal increase in ambient noise is anticipated to be created by casual use of the proposed loop system.

Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the information contained in EA OR090-00-04 and all other information available to me, it is my determination that implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the *ROD (Record of Decision) for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994)* and the *Eugene District ROD and Resource Management Plan (June 1995)*. Environmental Assessment OR090-00-04 is in conformance with the above documents and does not, in and of itself, constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS (environmental impact statement) or a supplement to the existing EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Decision and Rationale

It is my decision to select Alternative III (Agency Trail Management, Dual-Track Construction). The features described in Section 2.4 (Alternative III: Agency Trail Management, Dual-Track Construction) will be implemented with the exception of culvert removal and/or replacement proposed along BLM Road Nos. 15-2-22 and 15-1-18 (see culvert removal information under **Public Comments**). In addition, road segments included as part of the loop system would include signing to alert visitors of potential OHV activity (see road safety information under **Public Comments**). Alternative III is selected because it meets project objectives described in Section 1.3 of the Shotgun Trail EA. It represents a reasonable starting point toward better managing OHV activity within a historically popular OHV riding area.

Alternative III is consistent with the standards and guidelines in the *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994)*. Alternative III would not prevent nor retard attainment of any of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives (EA OR090-00-04, p. 43). Alternative III is consistent with management action C17 of the Mohawk Recreation Area Management Plan (p. 23), and the analysis and recommendations in the Mohawk/McGowan Watershed Analysis (1995).

Alternative I was not selected because it would eliminate a popular 4X4 recreational opportunity. Under Alternative I, BLM Road 15-2-22 would be converted to a single-track trail and closed to 2-track vehicles.

The No Action Alternative was not selected because it fails to support BLM efforts to manage OHV activity within a popular riding area. The No Action Alternative would not provide planned, deliberate resource protection actions that effectively address trail recreation impacts. Nor would it provide a basis for visitor services (e.g., signing, visitor maps, brochures, patrols, etc.).

Administrative Review Opportunities

The decision to implement this project may be appealed to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. If an appeal is taken, the notice of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days of the publication of the notice of this decision in the Eugene Register-Guard for transmittal to the Board. A copy of the notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 500 NE Multnomah Street, Suite 607, Portland, Oregon, 97323, within the same time frame. In taking an appeal, there must be strict compliance with the regulations. In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, an appellant has the right to petition the Office of Hearing and Appeals to stay the implementation of the decision; however, an appellant must show standing and present reasons for requesting a stay of the decision. The petition for stay must be filed together with a timely notice of appeal (43 CFR 4.21(a)(2)).

Approved by: Emily Rice
Field Manager, McKenzie Resource Area

Date: July 25, 2000